

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 OES-06 HEW-04 AID-05 IO-13 DHA-02

OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

DIWY-01 /095 W

-----021820 115517 /46

R 021150Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1627

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMCONSUL MADRAS

AMEMBASSY MANILA

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PASS OES/PA, DHEW/ PHS/OIH/NIH, AID/PHA/POP, AID/ASIA/BIS,
AID/PPC/RC

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SPOP, IN

SUBJECT: INDIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS AND FAMILY PLANNING

1. SUMMARY: THE INDIAN GOVT FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM AND THE INTENSIVE STERILIZATION CAMPAIGN CONDUCTED OVER THE PAST TEN MONTHS HAVE BECOME A MAJOR ISSUE IN THE CURRENT ELECTIONS. MANY STATES HAVE DECIDED UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE CENTER TO WITHDRAW VARIOUS FAMILY PLANNING DIS-INCENTIVES AND OTHER CONTROVERSIAL MEASURES INTRODUCED DURING THE PAK OF THE STERILIZATION CAMPAIGN. BECAUSE OF THIS POLITICAL SLOWDOWN IN THE STERILIZATION PROGRAM DURING THESE CRITICAL ELECTION WEEKS MANY FAMILY PLANNERS FEEL THIS WILL DAMAGE THE ENTIRE PROGRAM AND SET BACK THE

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MOMENTUM ESTABLISHED BY AT LEAST A YEAR. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH THE INITIATION OF THE NEW FAMILY PLANNING POLICY IN APRIL 1976, MORE EMPHASIS WAS PLACED ON STERILIZATION AS THE KEYSTONE OF THE FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM. IRONICALLY, THE GOVT'S INTENSIVE STERILIZATION CAMPAIGN DURING THE PAST TEN MONTHS HAS NOW BECOME A MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE IN THE INDIAN GENERAL

ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 16-20, 1977. OPPOSITION PARTIES CHARGE THE GOVT WITH EXCESSES IN FAMILY PLANNING. IN MOST POLITICAL MEETINGS THE OPPOSITION MAKES REFERENCE TO "COM-PULSION AND FORCED STERILIZATIONS" ALLEGEDLY BEING CARRIED OUT IN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY DURING THE INTENSIVE CAMPAIGNING. MANY HORROR STORIES HAVE BEEN QUOTED BY THE OPPOSITION AND HAVE APPEARED IN THE PRESS. OTHER STORIES ON FRAUD AND CORRUPTION CONNECTED WITH LOCAL STERILIZATION PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN APPEARING ALMOST DAILY IN THE PRESS. THESE STORIES HAVE BEEN COUNTERED IN SPEECHES BY THE PRIME MINISTER, HEALTH MINISTER, AND OTHERS WHEREVER POSSIBLE. MRS. GANDHI ADMITTED THIS WEEK IN A SPEECH IN NEW DELHI THAT "MISTAKES HAVE BEEN COMMITTED (IN FAMILY PLANNING) NOT ONLY BY OFFICIALS BUT PERHAPS BY POLITICIANS ALSO". "WE DON'T WANT TO HIDE OUR MISTAKES BUT SOME POSITIVE STEPS HAVE ALSO BEEN TAKEN", MRS. GANDHI SAID. KAREN SINGH, THE MINISTER OF HEALTH & FAMILY PLANNING, IN A RECENT POLITICAL SPEECH INDICATED "THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN SOME HARASSMENT AND OVER-ENTHUSIASM" IN STRESSING DISINCENTIVES AT THE STATE LEVEL. HOWEVER, HE FELT THAT A FEW UNFORTUNATE CASES OF "OVER ZEALOUSNESS" SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO DISTORT THE FACT OF A REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT IN FAMILY PLANNING DURING THE PAST YEAR. HE INDICATED THAT BY THE END OF FEBRUARY THERE WOULD BE ABOUT EIGHT MILLION STERILIZATIONS PERFORMED VERSUS A TARGET OF 4.3 MILLION FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING MARCH 31. HE MENTIONED THAT EVEN BEFORE THE ELECTIONS WERE ANNOUNCED HE HAD INSTRUCTED THE STATES TO EMPHASIZE INCENTIVES AND WHEREVER POSSIBLE TO ABOLISH THE DISINCENTIVE PROGRAMS THAT HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED.

3. UNDER INCREASING POLITICAL AND PUBLIC PRESSURE MANY STATE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GOVTS HAVE ALREADY EITHER SUSPENDED OR CANCELLED SEVERAL CONTROVERSIAL DISINCENTIVE MEASURES INTRODUCED DURING THE PAST YEAR. FOR EXAMPLE, DELHI, HARYANA, UTTAR PRADESH, BIHAR, MADHYA PRADESH, RAJASTHAN AND WEST BENGAL HAVE WITHDRAWN THEIR ORDERS REQUIRING STATE EMPLOYEES TO BECOME STERILIZED AFTER THREE CHILDREN TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR VARIOUS GOVT SERVICE BENEFITS SUCH AS FREE MEDICAL CARE, LEAVE TRAVEL CONCESSIONS, ALLOTMENT OF LIVING QUARTERS, GOVT LOANS, ETC. THE DELHI ADMINISTRATION HAS ALSO CANCELLED ITS ORDER REQUIRING PATIENTS WITH MORE THAN THREE CHILDREN TO ACCEPT STERILIZATION IN ORDER TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR FREE MEDICAL CARE AT GOVT HOSPITALS AND CLINICS. THE MAHARASHTRA RESTRICTION OF FAMILY SIZE BILL THAT WAS SENT TO THE CENTRAL GOVT FOR PRESIDENTIAL ASSENT LAST OCTOBER HAS BEEN RETURNED TO THE STATE FOR REVISION. THE CHIEF MINISTER HAS BEEN TOLD TO ELIMINATE ALL ELEMENTS OF COMPULSION IN THE BILL AND FORMULATE IT IN COGNIZANCE WITH THE GOP POLICY OF MOTIVATION AND VOLUNTARY ACCEPTANCE. ACCORDING TO THE CHIEF MINISTER, NO COERCION OR COMPULSION IN FAMILY PLANNING WILL BE ALLOWED IN THE STATE IN THE FUTURE. (CONT...)

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4. THE POLITICAL ATTACKS ON THE STERILIZATION PROGRAM AND THE SUSPENSION OR WITHDRAWAL OF VARIOUS MEASURES INTRODUCED AT THE PEAK OF THE CAMPAIGN HAVE LED TO A SHARP DECLINE IN STERILIZATIONS DURING JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 1977. AS COMPARED TO AN AVERAGE OF 1.5 MILLION STERILIZATIONS PER MONTH PERFORMED DURING THE INTENSIVE CAMPAIGNS, ONLY ABOUT 540,000 WERE ACCOMPLISHED IN JANUARY 1977. ACCORDING TO MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING SOURCES, STERILIZATIONS WILL AGAIN AVERAGE ABOUT 500,000 IN FEBRUARY.

5. COMMENTS: THESE LATEST EVENTS HIGHLIGHT THE POLITICAL DANGERS OF INTENSIVE, HIGH PRESSURE, TARGET ORIENTED SHORT TERM MEASURES AND NON-JUDICIOUS USE OF INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES.
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HOWEVER, THE MANIFESTOS OF ALL POLITICAL PARTIES INCLUDE THE NEED TO CHECK RAPID POPULATION GROWTH. THE MAJOR LOS ACCORDING TO STATE AND CENTRAL FAMILY PLANNERS WILL BE THE SLOWDOWN IN THE MOMENTUM THAT HAD BEEN BUILT UP OVER THE PAST YEAR. SOME SAY THIS WILL SER THE FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM BACK AT LEAST A YEAR EVEN IF THE PRESENT GOVT IS RETURNED TO POWER. THIS IS UNFORTUNATE BECAUSE, AFTER VACILLATING FOR OVER 20 YEARS, THE CENTRAL GOVT HAD FINALLY, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, MADE A FULL COMMITMENT TO FAMILY PLANNING FROM THE TOP ON DOWN. MOST AGREED THAT THIS COMMITMENT AND MOTIVATIN WAS FINALLY REACHING DOWN TO THE RURAL VILLAGE LEVEL IN MANY AREAS WHERE FAMILY PLANNING ACCEPTANCE WAS BECOME POPULAR.

6. DR. D. N. PAI, DIRECTOR OF FAMILY PLANNING FOT THE GREATER BOMBAY AREA, TOLD THE SCIENCE ATTACHE THAT IT WAS, IN HIS OPINION, ONLY NECESSARY TO STERILIZE AN AVERAGE 4.5 TO 5 MILLION PEOPLE PER YEAR, WHICH WAS THE OPTIMUM NUMBER TO REACH THE DESIRED GOALS ZN A BIRTH RATE OF 30 PER THOUSAND BY 1979 AND 25 PER THOUSAND BY 1984. THIS, HE FEELS, IS CERTAINLY A FEASIBLE TARGET WITH THE PRSENT HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING INFRSTRUCTURE AND NEEDS ONLY PROPER ORGANIZATION. HE INDICATED THIS COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH ADEQUATE INCENTIVES AND WITH ABOLISHING THE DISINCENTIVE PROGRAM WHICH ONLY LEADS TO FRAUD AND CORRUPTION AND TURNS THE PEOPLE AGAINST THE PROGRAM. PAI FEELS THAT THE MAIN PROBLEM IS THE ELIMINATION OF FEAR IN THE VILLAGE PEOPLE, AND THIS, HE SAID, WAS SLOWLY BEING ACCOMPLISHED, AT LEAST IN MAHARASHTRA. IN NORTHERN INDIA IT WILL PROBABLY BE A FAR SLOWER PROCESS
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Message Attributes

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